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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PAKTYA PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN: SMALL STEP FIGHTING
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

REF: KABUL 4150

¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment: Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) representatives participated in a December celebration of the International Days on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Gardez, Paktya, a heavily Pushtun province. The event was attended by more than 60 women and approximately 80 men, and featured more than a dozen speakers, including the PRT's DoS representative. During her presentation, PRT rep linked the protection of women's rights to President Obama's call in his speech of December 1 for bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. Paktya Province Deputy Governor Mangal somewhat surprisingly chose to use his address to call for a stronger rule of law not only to protect human rights, but more importantly to fight corruption. He appeared to be distancing himself from Governor Hamdard, and for good cause if the allegations of the latter's involvement with wide-ranging corruption and support for the insurgency in Paktya are true (reftel). End summary and comment.

RARE DISPLAY OF GENDER EQUALITY IN PUSHTUN DOMINANT PROVINCE

¶2. (U) Paktya PRT representatives participated in the event with the Gardez regional office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). In addition to Paktya Deputy Governor Mangal and the PRT rep, speakers included the AIHRC Regional Director, a UNAMA representative, and several provincial line directors, including the director for women's affairs. Many of the speakers spoke on the role of education in preventing violence against women and the importance of women in Afghan society.

¶3. (U) For a public event in Paktya, where female participants are typically seldom seen and speakers usually include only token female politicians, this was a rare display of gender equality in a Pashtun dominant province. Prior to the event, PRT OFFs spoke with women in the audience who indicated unemployment was a major issue for them, as many of their family members were continuously looking for work. One woman said that she had four daughters--the three oldest of whom were 8, 10, and 13 were already married because she could not afford to support them. All the women said their school-aged daughters who were not married attended school. When asked about whether they voted in the elections, the women noted that politics was not for them and they allowed their husbands to vote for them.

WIDESPREAD ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S NEW STRATEGY

¶4. (U) During her presentation, the PRT's DoS representative linked the protection of women's rights to President Obama's call in his December 1 speech for bringing

peace and stability to Afghanistan. She focused on the need to educate both men and women, and the strong link between respect for human rights and the rule of law. The audience acknowledged the President's speech and expressed interest in better understanding his plan for the future of Afghanistan. (Note: During a separate, subsequent shura in Jaji District on the Pakistan border, the district governor also referred to President Obama's speech--as well as President Karzai's inaugural address--within the context of renewed focus on development at the district level throughout Afghanistan. End note.)

DEPUTY GOVERNOR LINKS HUMAN RIGHTS TO FIGHTING CORRUPTION

15. (SBU) Paktya Province Deputy Governor Mangal chose to use his address to call for a stronger rule of law not only to protect human rights, but more importantly to fight corruption. In a veiled reference to allegations of corruption surrounding Governor Juma Khan Hamdard (reftel), he underscored the corrosive effects on sub-national governance of such common practices as nepotism and bribery. Just switching corrupt senior government officials from positions of trust in one province to other provinces, he asserted, would not solve the problem.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The theme of Mangal's address was somewhat surprising; he appeared to be distancing himself from Governor Hamdard, and for good cause if the allegations of

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the latter's involvement with wide-ranging corruption and support for the insurgency in Paktya are true. By indirectly denouncing him in public, and encouraging the participation of women in the civil society of this Pushtun enclave, the Deputy Governor is helping us set the conditions for development outlined in President Karzai's and Obama's recent respective speeches. We will continue our efforts to expose Governor Hamdard as a significant malign influence with respect to both corruption and support for the insurgency, and to pursue development programs that directly benefit the Pushtun women of Paktya. End comment.
EIKENBERRY